

American Dream and Arthur Miller: A Study of *The Price*

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ABSTRACT

*In this paper the first part deals with the concept of American Dream on the back drop of various interpretations given by American statesmen, writers, historians and critics. The second part analyses how American Dream, in the era of the Great Depression, has its impact on Miller's characters of one of the major plays *The Price* and how it affects their personality. It has been an accepted view that Miller wrote primarily on the backdrop of Great Depression and most of his protagonists are either the victims or the products of it and they struggle and suffer to negotiate their identities due to the wrong notion of American Dream.*

Keywords:

*American Dream, Arthur Miller, *The Price**

The Great Depression occurred in October 1929 when the New York stock market crashed resulting in the collapse of United States banks and many other financial institutions including their huge number of depositors. With receding of investment, industrial production suffered a jolt which led to falling employment and lower wages. The intensity of the Great Depression had no precedent in the history of industrial societies which has further exacerbated the scepticism of the people towards government's policies. But the Great Depression was more than an economic affair as it also made deep mark on human psychology. It affected innumerable lives by creating hardship and tension which lasted for more than a decade and continued even as the crisis itself eased. It was an event that palpably contradicted the optimistic assumptions of the later 19th century which was shared by the notion of American Dream.

The term "American Dream" is interpreted in a number of ways, but it is a national ethos of the United States of America which advocates that all people can succeed through hard work, and that all people have the potentiality to live happy and prosperous lives. Divergent interpretations of the definition of the American Dream have also invited a fair amount of criticism. Many people believe that the structure of American society beleaguered by discrimination based on class, race, ethnicity and unequal distribution of wealth itself controverts the realization of the American Dream.

The concept of American Dream dates back even before the formation of the United States in 1600s, when the great migration from various European countries have started as people started coming with all kinds of hopes and aspirations for the new and largely unexplored continent. Primarily their dreams focused on possessing land and setting up trade which would supposedly bring happiness. As the Royal governor of Virginia noted in 1774,

the Americans, "for ever imagine the Lands further off are still better than those upon which they are already settled." He added that if they attained Paradise, they would move on if they heard of a better place farther west. (Miller, John C 77)

American dream also includes the opportunity for facilitating primary means for upbringing one's children and providing good education and career to them. Immigrants to the United States sponsored ethnic newspapers in their own language; the editors typically promoted the American Dream. In the 19th century the United States witnessed the immigration of a large number of educated and culturally sophisticated German refugees who came to settle in this New World after the failed revolution in Germany in 1848.

The divergent interpretations of the idea of American Dream also give larger scope to look into various aspects of American society and people. The indication of the idea of American Dream is itself imbibed in The Declaration of Independence where it is stated: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." (Kloppenber 147) M. G. J. de Crèvecoeur in his *Letters from an American Farmer* enlarged the scope of the concept of American Dream:

"The American is a new man, who acts upon new principles; he must therefore entertain new ideas, and form new opinions. . . . Here individuals of all nations are melted into a new race of men, whose labours and posterity will one day cause great changes in the world. . . . An [immigrant] when he first arrives . . . no sooner breathes our air than he

forms new schemes, and embarks in designs he never would have thought of in his own country. . . . He begins to feel the effects of a sort of resurrection; hitherto he had not lived, but simply vegetated; he now feels himself a man . . . Judge what an alteration there must arise in the mind and thoughts of this man; . . . his heart involuntarily swells and glows; this first swell inspires him with those new thoughts which constitute an American.” (de Crèvecoeur 46-47)

Abraham Lincoln, President of the United States of America, in a speech arguing for the preservation of the Union in 1864, stated:

“I happen temporarily to occupy this big White House. I am a living witness that anyone of your children may look to come here as my father’s child has. It is in order that each of you may have through this free government which we have enjoyed, an open field and a fair chance for your industry, enterprise, and intelligence; that you may all have equal privileges in the race of life, with all its desirable human aspirations. It is for this the struggle should be maintained, that we may not lose our birthright. . . . The nation is worth fighting for, to secure such an inestimable jewel.” (Cullen 74)

Americans have traditionally known for their efforts on thrift and hard

work. Benjamin Franklin advised people on the “The Way to Wealth.” *Poor Richard's Principle* advised that “Early to Bed, and early to rise, makes a Man healthy, wealthy, and wise.” The key to wealth was industry: “Industry pays debts,” insisted Poor Richard (Wuthnow 1966). Benjamin Franklin's notion of industry was turned by the Americans into a labour ideology. He insisted on economic independence and on the opportunity for social advancement through financial gain. In the words of Abraham Lincoln:

“The prudent, penniless beginner in the world, labors for wages awhile, saves a surplus with which to buy tools or land, for himself; then labors on his own account another while, and at length hires another new beginner to help him.” (Moore, Wilstach and Baldwin 310)

He further stated:

“This...is free labor--the just and generous, and prosperous system, which opens the way for all.” (Cuomo, Mario M & Harold Holzer 161)

The changing economic scenario due to the industrialization in the last part of the nineteenth century has landed many Americans in profound hardship. Their search for consolation found a place in the tales of Horatio Alger, whose characters overcame adversity through industry, perseverance, self-reliance, and self-discipline. The ubiquitous “rags to riches” legend became a foundation of American society; anyone could succeed and achieve material prosperity through hard work. The pledge to industry and hard labour illustrated by Alger's characters, Lincoln's ideals of free labour, and

Franklin's practical maxims were further coagulated in the American mind by Protestant "work ethic". (Tebbel 1963) Many believed that hard work allowed one to not only achieve financial success, but, through that success, revealed God's grace. Colonel Joshua Lawrence Chamberlain, one of the officers of Union Army during the American Civil War, while addressing the Maine Soldiers, invoked the ideals of American Dream:

"This is free ground. All the way from here to the Pacific Ocean. No man has to bow. No man born to royalty. Here we judge you by what you do, not by what your father was. Here you can be something. Here's a place to build a home. . . It's the idea that we all have value, you and me . . .?" (Pillai, Rajnandini & Susan Stites-Doe 36)

The poem "The New Colossus" by Emma Lazarus, part of which is also inscribed on the pedestal of the Statue of Liberty, puts the ideals of American Dream in a simplistic manner:

"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to be free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless,
tempest-tost to me,
I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

(Hollander 20)

Israel Zangwill popularized the idea of America as the melting pot which has become a land of assemblage of different races of the world in order to accomplish their dreams:

"America is God's Crucible,
the great Melting Pot where
all the races of Europe are

melting and reforming! Here you stand, good folk, think I, when I see them at Ellis Island, here you stand in your fifty groups with your fifty languages and histories . . . into the crucible with you all! God is making the American . . . the real American has not yet arrived. He is only in the crucible, I tell you he will be the fusion of all the races."
(Zangwill 33)

The opening of the twentieth century and particularly the economic prosperity and spreading of consumerism in American life have focused on the materialistic aspect of American Dream. Herbert Hoover, a Republican and the 31st President of the United States, in his presidential campaign slogan in 1928: "A chicken in every pot, and a car in every garage" (Ribble 111) gave the ultimate material aspect of American Dream and it is needless to point out that the slogan had caught the attention of American voters and resulted in the thumping victory for Hoover in the presidential election.

James Truslow Adams, a prominent historian, has pointed out the all encompassing idea of American Dream in his book *Epic of America*:

"The American Dream is that dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement. It is a difficult dream for the European upper classes to interpret adequately, also too many of us ourselves have grown weary and mistrustful of it. It is not a dream of motor cars and high wages merely, but a dream of

social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to attain to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position. . . The American Dream, that has lured tens of millions of all nations to our shores in the past century has not been a dream of material plenty, though that has doubtlessly counted heavily. It has been a dream of being able to grow to fullest development as a man and woman, unhampered by the barriers which had slowly been erected in the older civilizations, unrepressed by social orders which had developed for the benefit of classes rather than for the simple human being of any and every class.” (Adams 214-215)

News commentator and reporter Dan Rather, on the research behind his book *The American Dream*, reiterates what other historians, political analysts and sociologists have pointed out:

“The American Dream [is] one of the greatest ideas in the history of human achievement . . . It thrives today in an age when its core components of freedom and opportunity are open to more Americans than ever before. It holds a real, identifiable place in the American heart and mind, and it informs the aspirations of everyone from farmers to software developers, from detectives to bankers, from soldiers to social workers . . . It defines us as a

people, even as we add to its meaning with each new chapter in our national experience and our individual actions.” (quoted in back cover, *The American Dream*, HarperCollins, 2002)

American Dream fascinates not only the emigrant European entrepreneurs and other nationalities who ventured in this country to realize their dreams and attain material prosperity and success, but it also connotes a different meaning to the people of African American community who feel marginalized in the greater American society. Langston Hughes, one of the greatest poets of the African American community, gave voice of the community in his famous poem “I Dream a World”:

I dream a world where man
No other man will scorn,
Where love will bless the earth
And peace its paths adorn
I dream a world where all
Will know sweet freedom’s way,
Where greed no longer saps the
soul
Nor avarice blights our day.
A world I dream where black or
white,
Whatever race you be,
Will share the bounties of the
earth
And every man is free,
Where wretchedness will hang its
head
And joy, like a pearl,
Attends the needs of all
mankind—
Of such I dream, my world!

(Rampersad 25)

Martin Luther King Jr., another luminary who also belonged to African American community and a prominent civil rights activist, in his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” (1963) talked about the

civil rights in his interpretation of the American dream:

“I still have a dream. It is deeply rooted in the American dream . . . I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood . . . I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character. . . We will win our freedom because the sacred heritage of our nation and the eternal will of God are embodied in our echoing demands. . . . when these disinherited children of God sat down at lunch counters they were in reality standing up for what is best in the American dream and for the most sacred values in our Judeo-Christian heritage, thereby bringing our nation back to those great wells of democracy which were dug deep by the founding fathers in their formulation of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.” (Bond, Jon R. & Kevin B. Smith 154)

Bharati Mukherjee, an Indian American novelist, interprets American Dream from the point of view of her diasporic experience. In an interview with Bill Moyers, Mukherjee stated:

“You see for me, America is an idea. It is a stage for transformation. I felt when I came to Iowa City from

Calcutta that suddenly I could be a new person . . . What America offers me is romanticism and merit counts, where I could choose to discard that part of my history that I want, and invent a whole new history for myself. It's that capacity to dream and then try to pull it off, if you can.” (Tucher 3)

Some more interpretations of American Dream also reveal other aspects of American society and people. John Steinbeck, author, in his book *Travels with Charley: In Search of America* states:

“Could it be that Americans are a restless people, a mobile people, never satisfied with where they are as a matter of selection? The pioneers, the immigrants who peopled the continent, were the restless ones in Europe.

The steady rooted ones stayed home and are still there.” (Steinbeck 80)

Jim Cullen, author of *The American Dream*, states:

“And that's more or less where we remain today: life, liberty, and as much entertainment as is digitally possible.” (Cullen 58)

Richard Florida in his article "The New American Dream" published in *Washington Monthly* gives a new perspective of American Dream:

"The American Dream is no longer just about money. Better pay, a nice house, and a rising standard of living will always be attractive. But my research and others' show another factor emerging: The new American Dream is to

maintain a reasonable living standard while doing work that we enjoy doing. In fact, many people are willing to trade income for work they enjoy."(www.washingtonmonthly.com)

Scott Russell Sanders, Professor for English at Indiana University in Bloomington, states:

"The deepest American dream is not the hunger for money or fame; it is the dream of settling down, in peace and freedom and cooperation, in the promised land."
(<http://www.quoteworld.org>)

Again there is also a kind of scepticism regarding American Dream. Archibald Macleish (1892-1982), an American author, points out:

"There are those, I know, who will reply that the liberation of humanity, the freedom of man and mind, is nothing but a dream. They are right. It is. It is the American Dream."

(<http://www.nonstopenglish.com>)

David Abrahansen, a psychoanalyst, points out the darker aspect of American Dream:

"The American dream is, in part, responsible for a great deal of crime and violence because people feel that the country owes them not only a living but a good living."
(<http://www.bartleby.com>)

Ellen D. Wu has contested the popular view that American Dream can be achieved by hard labour; rather he states that it is nothing but nightmare for the hardworking poor people of America and pointed out that it is based on political and economic discrimination:

"Many believe that if you work hard in America, you will succeed and achieve the "American Dream." However, there are plenty of people who labor very hard every day—perhaps waiters in New York City's Chinatown restaurants or seamstresses in Los Angeles' clothing sweatshops, or even dry cleaners and grocery store owners right here in Indianapolis—who don't make it, the working poor who earn barely enough to survive and whose living conditions might be better described as the "American Nightmare."

I would argue that their experiences are a direct result of problems of discrimination and, more broadly, the structure of political economy, and that these problems affect not only the most oppressed, disenfranchised, and powerless, but all of us, even the privileged, because we live in an exclusionary society that is fundamentally built on racism and class exploitation. Individually, some of us may succeed, but until all of us—Chinese Americans, Asian Americans, Americans—have equality of opportunity, problems of discrimination such as campaigns against affirmative action, immigrants' rights, and bilingual education, truly do apply to all of us."

(http://www.aaalliance.org/June_2002_%20Rev.pdf)

Moreover, the prospect of the realization of American Dream in the era

of Great Depression became more susceptible and the disturbing realities after the stock market crash on October 24, 1929 caused a number of changes and chaos in the structure of American society. Charles R. Hearn explains the American dream of success, to be exact, in the Great Depression as follows:

“The American myth of success has had remarkable vitality and persistence, especially on the popular level. The essential question underlying [...] is this: What happened to this deeply ingrained and wonderfully compelling dream of success during the Depression of the 1930s when the stark reality of an economic crisis seemed to belie the assumption that, in America, anyone who possessed the proper personal virtues (initiatives, perseverance, frugality, industry, reliability) could raise himself from poverty to wealth? Historically, the myth of success has been identified with our most cherished cultural values, focusing, dramatizing, and supporting the very ideals that we consider most distinctively “American.” (Hearn 4)

The depression affected important cultural and business practices founded on this common ground of American Dream. The writers writing during the period and after were influenced by it and their literary works bear testimony to it. Arthur Miller is also no exception to this.

II

Critics of Arthur Miller have shown considerable interest on Miller’s response

to the so-called American Dream in his plays. Marilyn Berger, writing an obituary “Arthur Miller, Moral Voice of American Stage, Dies at 89” in the *New York Times* on February 11, 2005, said that Miller’s “work exposed the flaws in the fabric of the American dream.” (<http://theater.nytimes.com/2005/02/11/theater/newsandfeatures/11cnd-miller.html?ref=arthurmiller>) *CNN* stated that his plays depicted “the American Dream gone awry”, the *BBC* called them “intricate musings on the darkness at the heart of the American Dream”, and Xan Brooks, in the *Guardian*, described *Death of a Salesman*, the play that won Miller the Pulitzer Prize for drama in 1949, as “a savage assault on the American dream.” (<http://booksinq.blogspot.in/2005/03/arthur-miller-american-dream.html>). Miller, in an interview with Matthew C. Roudane, talks about the influence of American Dream on his artistry:

“The American Dream is the largely unacknowledged screen in front of which all American writing plays itself out – the screen of the perfectibility of man. Whoever is writing in the United States is using the American Dream as an ironical pole of his story. Early on we all drink up certain claims to self-perfection that are absent in a large part of the world. People elsewhere tend to accept, to a far greater degree anyway, that the conditions of life are hostile to man’s pretensions. The American idea is different in the sense that we think that if we could only touch it, and live by it, there’s a natural order in favor of us; and that the object of a good life is to get connected with

that live and abundant order. And this forms a context of irony for the kind of stories we generally tell each other. After all, the stories of most significant literary works are of one or another kind of failure. And it's a failure in *relation to* that screen, that backdrop. I think it pervades American writing, including my own. It's there in *The Crucible*, in *All My Sons*, in *After the Fall* – an aspiration to an innocence that when defeated or frustrated can turn quite murderous, and we don't know what to do with this perversity; it never seems to “fit” us.” (Martin 420 - 21)

The beginning of Miller's dramatic career was the Great Depression period right after the stock market crash of 1929. He along with his family was greatly affected by the Great Depression, losing almost everything, and the experience was something which he later on considered as being eye-opening. In “The Shadows of the Gods” he shared the experience as follows:

“Until 1929 I thought things were pretty solid. Specifically, I thought – like most Americans – that somebody was in charge. I didn't know exactly who it was, but it was probably a business man, and he was a realist, a no-nonsense fellow, practical, honest, responsible. In 1929 he jumped out of the window. It was bewildering [...] Practically everything that had been said and done up to 1929 turned out to be a fake. It turns out that there had

never been anybody in charge. What the time gave me, I think now, was a sense of an invisible world. A reality had been secretly accumulating its climax according to its hidden laws to explode illusion at the proper time. In that sense 1929 was our Greek year. The gods had spoken, the gods, whose wisdom had been set aside or distorted by a civilization that was to go onward and upward on speculation, gambling, graft, and the dog eating the dog.” (Miller, “The Shadows of the Gods” 176-177)

Dennis Welland elaborated this phenomenon of the serious influence of Great Depression upon Miller in the following terms:

“It was the Depression that gave him his compassionate understanding of the insecurity of man in modern industrial civilization, his deep-rooted belief in social responsibility, and the moral earnestness that has occasioned unsympathetic – and often unjust – criticism in the age of the Affluent Society.” (Welland 6-7)

The sudden Depression during a period of great economic prosperity and stock market boom following the World War I was a huge shock to most of the people belonging to the affluent class and and it seemed to Miller that this catastrophe was brought in by “an invisible world.” Christopher Bigsby, in analysing the character of David Beeves, the protagonist of Miller's one of the earliest plays written during the period *The Man Who Had All*

the Luck, points out the social effects on him:

“The real itself seemed problematic. A life that had seemed so coherent, so inevitable, secure in its procedures, values, assumptions, disappeared overnight. David Beeves believed someone was in charge, not a businessman, to be sure, but someone, until suddenly he could no longer believe this to be true. God, it seemed, had jumped to his death.” (Biggsby xvii)

In his early plays viz. *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman* Arthur Miller depicted the futility of American Dream of success. The protagonists of these two plays - Joe Keller, a successful businessman and Willy Loman, an unsuccessful salesman - represent the business community of the period who struggle to render a meaning to the so called American Dream. In the competitive consumer society of America, what Miller calls “dog-eat-dog society,” success is not only the outcome of hard work, as was held by the early followers of American Dream, rather it is closely related to Darwinian principle of “survival of the fittest”. This is the reason why Joe does not suffer from any sort of moral scruple in deceiving his friend and business partner as well as his country for his own success in business. Willy Loman also finds himself unfit in the new world of American Dream. In some other plays of Miller also, one may find that his protagonists struggle to negotiate their identities due to their inability to comprehend the changing meaning of American Dream.

The Price was first produced on Broadway at the Morosco Theatre on February 7, 1968 and subsequently moved

to the 46th Street Theatre on November 18, 1968. It ran for 429 performances and was nominated for two Tony Awards, for Best Play (writer: Arthur Miller, producer: Robert Whitehead) and Best Scenic Design (Boris Aronson).

The Price is one of Miller’s most under-recognized and least appreciated works unlike some other plays such as *The Crucible*, *All My Sons* and *Death of a Salesman* which became parts of the American canon of drama and were already there on student reading lists for years. *The Price* was written on the backdrop of the death of Miller’s father and the impact of it on the two living sons. The play deals with the impact of the Depression and addresses the deconstruction of the myth of American Dream. The story is about two brothers who, after sixteen years of estrangement, try to reunite on the occasion of disposing their old furniture. The play presents an insight into the relationships between brothers as well as their memory and the impact of the past.

One may say that the two brothers of *The Price*, Victor and Walter Franz, might be Biff and Happy Loman of *Death of a Salesman* twenty years later. Police Sergeant Victor Franz returns to the attic of his family home which is about to be torn down as it has now become “the chaos of ten rooms of furniture”. But it was the same house where he and his father lived following the stock market crash of 1929 that ruined the family’s fortune. Victor has called a second-hand furniture dealer through the Yellow Pages to buy the collection. His wife Esther implores Victor to bargain hard so that they can plan their future life following his retirement with the money from the sale. Gregory Solomon, a late octogenarian, arrives and is initially daunted by the amount of furniture; but he agrees to buy the lot and offers \$1,100 to Victor. Gregory Solomon is an old man who loves to talk and reveals his keen interest on women. As he studies

the pieces of furniture one by one, both he and Victor gradually understand each other, and also about the dead man who lived out the remains of his life in the attic. Just as Victor counts out the bills offered by Solomon, Walter enters and claims that he doesn't wish to interfere. But he argues that the amount is too less and a minimum of \$3000 would be reasonable. While Esther was initially disappointed in Victor's bargaining, she is now overwhelmed by Walter's new warmth toward them, more importantly because of his declaration that he does not want to split the purchase price with Victor. Walter further suggests that if Solomon can simply assess the highest possible retail value of the goods, they can make a donation to the Salvation Army to claim the deduction on his taxes, and the resultant \$12,000 or so will be "found money" which he could split with his brother. Victor is confused as he cannot understand the approach of his brother who was reluctant to communicate when he tried to get in touch over the years. Walter explains that after being hospitalized after a breakdown, a kind of realization prompts him to make amends to his earlier mistakes. He even offers Victor a job at his hospital, but Victor is still sceptical. When Victor states that he has sacrificed his career for the sake of the family and it was he who stayed with their father to look after him in his years of trouble, Walter insists that no one forced Victor to stay with their father; he further states that their father still had savings, and that it was wrong to sacrifice one's own future for him. Victor argues that what he had done was not for financial gain; rather his act of supporting their lonely father was out of love. Walter says that there was never love in their family, and with this feeling of an impasse, he leaves.

Victor and his brother Walter have been estranged for about sixteen years, and the obvious reason was the rift between them in the era of Depression when Victor had

to leave the school with unfinished degree as his brother Walter, who was already a doctor, refused to loan him a mere five hundred dollars. Victor's college career ended abruptly and he became a policeman, staying at home to care for their ailing father, who has lost his savings in the Wall Street Crash due to depression, for the rest of his life. Victor has never forgiven Walter for his betrayal of trust. But Victor does not have all the facts about Walter's refusal of the loan. Walter revealed the fact that when Walter had decided to join the Force leaving his college incomplete he called his father to desist him from doing it as "it was a terrible waste" of his caliber that could be better used in studying science. It is revealed that their father replied him that it was Victor's choice to look after him and he could not stop him doing it. This conversation between Walter and their father is unknown to Victor. Similarly, Walter does not realize the hardships to which Victor had to undergo - looking through the garbage to find food for the family - whereas Walter contributed only five dollars a month toward his father's maintenance. Again the reason of their father's manipulation as well as preference for Walter is also unanswered. As both the brothers express their anger, the gloomy picture of this dysfunctional and uncommunicative family is revealed.

Though the play deals with settling the price of articles, the reader instantly realizes that the real price Arthur Miller is talking about is not the value of the furniture, rather the price one has to pay for not acknowledging or knowingly ignoring the facts and issues of one's life. According to Susan C. W. Abbotson:

"The price is indeterminate as the furniture is valued differently by different people. But more specially, the price refers to the price that people pay for the choices that they make in

their lives, and the point is that every choice has a price of some kind, even though it might be hard to determine at the time.” (Abbotson 282)

Victor gets the price of taking care of his ailing father sacrificing his prospective college degree and a better profession. He needs to realize the real prize of his action as he is blessed with a steady married life and a son, Richard, who gets a full scholarship for his study. Moreover he gets the full amount from Solomon, who buys the entire lot of furniture, as Walter does not take his share of their father’s property. Walter is duly paid his price for his past actions as his quest for earning more and more money to realize American Dream of success lands him to suffer from nervous breakdown, divorce with his wife, estrangement from his brother for long years, and also to suffer the pain of being an unsuccessful father of college dropout sons. Esther, Victor's wife, is a long-suffering woman who has lived with disappointment for long and pines for living a more comfortable life as she states: “I want money!” Her dissatisfaction with her husband in this respect leads Victor towards confusion and identity crisis. But her ultimate realization about her husband paid her the price of understanding him with a new insight which removes her inferiority complex about herself and her husband.

The Price is about the price one has to pay for one’s past actions. Both Water and Victor have paid the price for the choices they made in their past. Walter, who suffers from the sense of alienation, faced the consequence of focusing too much on running after American Dream of success by sacrificing his family. At one point of time he even planned to kill his wife. His nervous breakdown leads him to realize the importance of family. He ultimately realized that his life is ruined by his greed for money and material success. His quest

for peace and stability ends with negotiating his identity with his family and the past.

Victor considers himself a victim of betrayal by his brother Walter who, according to him, escapes from responsibility. He accuses Walter for deserting the family at the time of crisis as well as for refusing to lend him money to complete his college: “I didn’t invent my life. Not altogether. You had a responsibility here and you walked on it . . .” (Miller, *Plays: Two* 363). According to Victor, one has to pay the price for the deeds committed and both he and Walter have also paid the price of their past actions:

“Walter, I haven’t got the education, what are you talking about? You can’t walk in with one splash and wash out twenty-eight years. There’s a price people pay. I’ve paid it, it’s all gone, I haven’t got it any more. Just like you paid, didn’t you? You’ve got no wife, you’ve lost your family, you’re rattling around all over the place? Can you go home and start all over again from scratch? This is where we are; now, right here, now.” (Miller, *Plays: Two* 361)

Victor was living a life of illusion believing that on the one hand when he has sacrificed himself in serving his ailing father who had become bankrupt in the Wall Street Crash, Walter has shunned away from taking any responsibility of the family. But the conversation between the brothers reveals another aspect of the truth that lands Victor in the state of confusion and existential crisis:

WALTER: If you can reach beyond anger, I’d like to tell you something.
Vic? *Victor does not*

move. I know I should have said this many years ago. But I did try. When you came to me I told you – remember I said, “Ask Dad for money”? I did say that.

Pause.

VICTOR: What are you talking about?

WALTER: He had nearly four thousand dollars.

ESTHER: When?

WALTER: When they were eating garbage here.

Pause.

VICTOR: How do you know that?

WALTER: He'd asked me to invest it for him.

VICTOR: Invest it.

WALTER: Yes. Not long before he sent you to me for the loan.

Victor is silent.

That's why I never sent him more than I did.

(Miller, *Plays: Two* 363)

This revelation makes Victor's life topsy-turvy as he now faces the dichotomy of accepting the truth which will deconstruct the long cherished image of his father and rejecting the argument of Walter considering it as his own creation to restore his own image in the eyes of Victor and Esther. In a way, in the event of accepting Walter's argument, his long cherished self-image of sacrifice also gets deconstructed. His crisis of identity is further intensified when Walter says:

“He lived on his money, believe me. I told him at the time, if he would send you through I'd contribute properly. But here he's got you running from job to job to feed him – I'm damned if I'd

sacrifice when he was holding out on you. You can understand that, can't you?” (Miller, *Plays: Two* 363)

But this crisis is not something new in case of Victor. Even before meeting Walter after an estrangement of sixteen years and knowing the things still unknown to him, Victor reveals his mind that he doesn't even understand himself: “I look at my life and the whole thing is incomprehensible to me. I know all the reasons and all the reasons and all the reasons, and it ends up – nothing” he confesses (Miller, *Plays: Two* 311). Victor gives up the life of luxury and indulgence in sex and thus nullifies the doctrine of American Dream. In a conversation Miller himself states:

“The policeman has refused to adopt the sex and success motives of the society. He has walled himself up against them and he has kept a certain kind of perverse integrity as a result of that but you see what he pays for that.” (Roudané, *Conversations* 188)

Victor feels frustrated for his failure to fulfil the wishes of his wife as well as for his lack of emotional attachment to his profession. Moreover, he lacks the courage and initiative to start anything new in life and he acknowledges his failure and thus tries to compromise with his statuesque and negotiate his identity. On the other hand, Walter, at the end, is able to negotiate his identity by acknowledging his own failure to share the family responsibility as well as by understanding the real worth of his brother:

“Vic, we were both running from the same

thing. I thought I wanted to be tops, but what it was was untouchable. I ended in a swamp of success and bankbooks, you on civil service. The difference is that you haven't hurt other people to defend yourself. And I've learned to respect that, Vic; you simply tried to make yourself useful." (Miller, *Plays: Two* 351-352)

The Price, thus, deals with social responsibility as Victor represents the moral vision Miller talks about in his conversation with Leonard Moss:

"The play is examining what you might call the architecture of sacrifice. And of course society depends on sacrifice; everybody has got to do a social duty. We expect the police or authorities to do that, certainly. There has to be the sort of a person who gets gratification from doing it or you're not going to have a society. And Victor, of course, is a policeman." (Roudané, *Conversations* 316)

The play, therefore, depicted the guilt and responsibility of the two brothers, Victor and Walter, who cannot reconcile with each other because of their past actions. But at the same time Gregory Solomon, the 89-year-old wisenheimer, provides a refreshing alternative to these two guilt-ridden brothers. He also provides a striking contrast to Victor, by embarking on the kind of self-chosen profession of purchasing and then reselling the furniture, this octogenarian shows the spirit and

initiative that frightens Victor, who is nearly half of his age.

The American Dream, the idea that incorporates hard work, persistence, initiative and possibly a little bit of luck; and if anyone can possess it one can reap the rewards of success. We find such persons who are constantly in search to possess it in Arthur Miller's plays. Whether it is Joe Keller in *All My Sons*, Willy Loman in *Death of a Salesman*, or the Franz brothers in *The Price*, each embraces the illusion of attaining this intangible mythic American Dream. Miller's characters confront and struggle to confer a definite shape to this elusive nature of dream; one that Miller feels makes the "common man as apt a subject for tragedy in its highest sense as kings were." *All My Sons* is the story of a man realizing the effects of his choices for attaining prosperity have on others, *Death of a Salesman* is the story of a man living with the illusions of success that have governed his life and again *The Price* is the story of two sons rediscovering the actions of their long-deceased father – who was devastated in the Depression along with the collapse of his American Dream – with their own pursuits and dreams. Many of Miller's characters reside in between the world of actuality and aspiration, or reality and illusion. In a conversation with Murray Schumach, Arthur Miller himself states:

"Every man has an image of himself which fails in one way or another to correspond with reality. It's the size of the discrepancy between illusion and reality that matters. The closer a man gets to knowing himself, the less likely he is to trip up on his own illusions." (Roudané, *Conversations* 7)

Unlike many of Miller's protagonists who are running after attaining American Dream of success we also come across some such protagonists who are intentionally turning away from the pursuit of the vaunted dream, a refusal, what Miller himself called "to be swept away and seduced to the values of the society." (Roudané, *Conversations* 188) He called it "the price of integrity" and we can see some of these indications in Victor's apparent contempt for money. Victor, a police officer, is seen by Miller as an embodiment of the "architecture of sacrifice," the kind of person upon which society depends for its sense of security and peace. On the other hand his brother, Walter, is a successful surgeon who is madly running after American Dream of success. Walter, Miller asserts, is the kind of person, "who invents new procedures because he is not bound by any reverence for what exists ... [the type who] adds something new to the way the world goes ... but [is] hell on their relatives." (Roudané, *Conversations* 316) Walter, after experiencing a recent divorce with his wife and being a not so successful father, acknowledges: "It all happens so gradually. You start out wanting to be the best, and there's no question that you do need a certain fanaticism; there's so much to know and so little time. Until you've eliminated everything extraneous – including people." (Miller, *Plays: Two* 350) Thus it is only after experiencing the gloomy aspect of the American Dream, the "swamp of success and bankbooks" as he calls it, that he realizes the damage done by his "slow, daily fear [of]

ambition," and the cost he has paid for it. *The Price* suggests that the American Dream always demands compromise and in turn a kind of sacrifice.

In *All My Sons*, *Death of a Salesman* as well as in *The Price* we are asked to witness the struggles of his protagonists who suffer due to the wrong dreams and due to their act of embracing too completely the ethics of American society intent on success at any price. Moreover in *Death of a Salesman* as well as in *All My Sons* we find his protagonists' sudden awareness of the futility of their lives and the identity crisis emerges due to their inability to negotiate properly the societal changes and their dreams. Miller's protagonists in these plays may be analyzed from the perspective of Alfred Adler who felt people are predominantly motivated by a search for superiority. For Willy Loman it is an imperfect visualization and result is the identity crisis and the ultimate failure; for Joe Keller it is the indecision of acceptance and negation of responsibility. Victor in *The Price*, also a victim of American Dream, finds no meaning of his life when he looks back his past and he suffers the crisis of identity when confronted with the dichotomy of acknowledging his failure and societal norm of looking like a successful man. Likewise his brother Walter also struggles to negotiate self and society and the result is identity crisis. The similar identity crisis also emerges in other protagonists of Miller when they are confronted with American Myth and reality.

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